

APPARATUS TO GUIDE LABEL STOCK IN A PRINTER

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to printers and, more particularly, to printers which utilize multiple widths of label stock or other media.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Thermal print heads are used for marking various indicia on heat sensitive labels. The labels may be attached to a backing and provided as a roll of label stock. Other types of label stock include linerless or backerless label stock. A roll of label stock is positioned within the printer to move label stock past the thermal print head. The label stock is driven by a roller which moves the label stock past the thermal print head so that the heat of the heating element acts on the heat sensitive labels, thereby marking the labels. Different widths of label stock are commonly used and available. Label printers may also utilize other types of print heads and label stock.

[0003] Accordingly, there is a need for a printer that can accommodate various widths of rolled label stock or other print media while at the same time maintaining proper alignment of the label stock or other print media with the print head.

SUMMARY

[0004] In one aspect, a label printing apparatus for accommodating a plurality of widths of rolled label stock is provided. The label printing apparatus includes a frame, a label stock support arm extending from the frame, and a print head located for having label stock passed thereby for printing. The label stock support arm includes at least two stepped regions for supporting rolled label stock, including a first stepped region with edges spaced apart by a first distance corresponding to a first width of label stock and a second stepped region with edges spaced apart by a second distance corresponding to a second width of label stock.

[0005] In another aspect, a label printing apparatus for accommodating a plurality of widths of rolled label stock is provided. The label printing apparatus of the second embodiment includes a frame, a label stock support arm extending from the frame for supporting a rolled label stock, and a print head. A label stock path extends from the label stock support arm to the print head. A label stock guide is positioned along the label stock path and has at least two recessed guide regions along which label stock can move. Specifically, the label stock guide may include a first recessed guide region sized to correspond to a first width of label stock and a second recessed guide region sized to correspond to a second width of label stock.

[0006] In still another aspect, a label printing apparatus for accommodating a plurality of widths of rolled label stock is provided. The label printing apparatus includes a frame, a label stock support arm extending from the frame, and a print head located for having label stock pass thereby for printing. A label stock path extends from the label stock support arm to the print head. At least one wall for positioning alongside the label stock path is provided. The wall is moveable and mountable in at least two positions and includes a first position to guide an edge of label stock of a first width and a second position to guide an edge of label stock of a second width.

[0007] It is recognized that any of the foregoing aspects could also be incorporated into a printer using print media other than label stock and that the foregoing aspects could be incorporated into a printer with or without a cassette that holds label stock for easy replacement, such as the label cassette shown and described in U.S. Patent No. 6,428,225.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- [0008]** Fig. 1 is a side perspective view of one embodiment of a label printing apparatus;
- [0009]** Fig. 2 is another side perspective view of the label printing apparatus of Fig. 1; and
- [0010]** Fig. 3 is a side elevational view depicting an exemplary label stock path.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0011] As shown in Figs. 1 and 2, a label printing apparatus, generally designated 10, includes a frame 12 having a label stock support arm 14 extending therefrom. The label stock support arm includes stepped regions 16. Specifically, a smallest size stepped region 18, an intermediate size stepped region 20 and a largest size stepped region 22 are provided. The stepped regions 14 are defined by respective edges 24 that are spaced apart to accommodate various widths (small, intermediate and large) of label stock.

[0012] A label stock guide 30 extends from the frame 12 and includes downwardly facing recessed guide regions 32. Specifically, a smallest size recessed guide region 34, an intermediate size recessed guide region 36 and a largest size recessed guide region 38 are provided to accommodate the three different widths of label stock. A lower label stock guide 40 includes upwardly facing recessed guide regions 42, specifically recessed guide regions 44, 46 and 48 to accommodate the three different widths of label stock.

[0013] A driven label stock backing reclamation arm 50 extends from the frame 12 and receives and collects the label stock backing after the label stock has passed through a print head assembly 52 and the labels have been removed from the backing. The labels may be removed from the backing by sharply turning the label stock about a pin or edge as is known in the art. Once labels have been removed from the label stock, the backing is collected on the label stock backing reclamation arm 50. Notably, the arm 50 includes a removable key 54 that is used to secure the backing paper to the arm 50. The key 54 includes a part 56 extending radially outward from the end of the arm 50 when the key 54 is installed. Spaced apart fingers 58 of the key engage corresponding slots 59 on the reclamation arm 50.

[0014] The print head assembly 52 includes a roller 60 and thermal print head 62 that define a print line 116 (Fig. 3) therebetween through which the label stock passes. The print line 116 runs substantially parallel to the center axis of the roller 60. Referring again to Figs. 1 and 2, label stock is positioned to pass through the print head assembly 52 such that a center point

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across the width of the label stock substantially coincides with the center point along the print line.

[0015] A wall 70 may be mounted and moveable to accommodate the different label stock widths. Wall 70 includes openings 72 and 74 through which arms 14 and 50 extend. Arm 14 includes wall receiving slots 76, 78 and 80 and arm 50 includes wall receiving slots 82, 84 and 86, with the wall shown mounted in slots 76 and 82. Thus, the wall 70 can be supported in multiple positions by arms 14 and 50. An additional wall support arm 90 is also provided and includes wall receiving slots 92, 94 and 96, with the wall 70 having a corresponding opening 97. Further, the guide 40 includes slots 98, 100 and 102 to receive a downwardly extending leg 104 of the wall.

[0016] Referring to Fig. 3, the arm 14 receives a roll of label stock 110 thereon. A label stock path 112 is defined as the path of the label stock as it moves from the rolled label stock 110 past the label stock guides 30 and 40 on its way to print head assembly 52. After passing through the print head assembly used label stock backing can be recollected about label stock backing reclamation arm 50 as shown. Notably, the print head assembly 52 may include a print head cover 114 protecting circuitry on the print head 62, and the cover 114 may include upwardly facing recessed regions similar to those of guide 40. The print line 116 of the print head assembly is also shown.

[0017] In use, the illustrated embodiment accommodates three different widths of label stock. For the smallest width of accommodated label stock the label stock supply roll sits in stepped region 18 of arm 14, the label stock moves along the label stock path and is guided by recessed regions 34 and 44 of guides 30 and 40 respectively, and inner wall 70 is mounted in slots 80, 86, 96 and 102 such that the inside facing edge of the label stock moves along the surface of the wall 70. In such case the edge 24 to edge 24 dimension of stepped region 18 and the sizing of recessed regions 34 and 44 corresponds to the width of the smallest accommodated label stock. For the intermediate width of accommodated label stock the label stock supply roll sits in stepped region 20 of arm 14, the label stock moves along the label stock path and is guided by

recessed regions 36 and 46 of guides 30 and 40 respectively, and inner wall 70 is mounted in slots 78, 84, 94 and 100 such that the inside facing edge of the label stock moves along the surface of the wall 70. In such case the edge 24 to edge 24 dimension of stepped region 20 and the sizing of recessed regions 36 and 46 corresponds to the width of the intermediate width of accommodated label stock. For the largest width of accommodated label stock the label stock supply roll sits in stepped region 22 of arm 14, the label stock moves along the label stock guide path and is guided by recessed regions 38 and 48 of guides 30 and 40 respectively, and inner wall 70 is mounted in slots 76, 82, 92 and 98 such that the inside facing edge of the label stock moves along the surface of the wall 70. In such case the edge 24 to edge 24 dimensions of stepped region 22 and the sizing of recessed regions 38 and 40 corresponds to the width of the largest width of accommodated label stock.

[0018] The illustrated embodiment maintains the label stock centered along the print line. Where the printer is used in combination with an automated label applier, the label position upon exiting the printer is also maintained as desired, regardless of the width of label stock utilized. For example, if a vacuum wand is used to apply labels exiting the printer, the labels can be centered about the axis of the vacuum wand.

[0019] The backing paper reclamation arm key 54 is used to secure the backing paper to the arm 50 by partially wrapping the backing paper about the arm 50 while the key 54 is removed and then inserting the key 54 onto the arm such that fingers 58 overlap and trap the backing paper. As the backing paper accumulates on the arm 50 during operation, the extension part 56 acts as a stop to prevent the backing paper from spiraling off the end of the arm, which aids in preventing malfunction of the label feed in the printer.

[0020] As best seen in Fig. 2, the printer 10 includes an internal compartment accessible by a pivoting door 110 having hinges 112 and 114 that define a pivot axis toward the rear of the printer. When the door is in the illustrated open position it is biased open by the action of a spring 116 that extends between the frame 12 and a bracket arrangement 118 acting as an over

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center mechanism. In the illustrated embodiment a front part 120 of the door moves outward and rearward from the front of the printer when the door 110 is pivoted open.

[0021] Although the invention is shown and described with respect to certain embodiments it is recognized that variations are possible. While the illustrated embodiment is configured to handle three widths of label stock, configurations handling only two widths or more than three widths are contemplated, in which case the label stock support arm might have a number of stepped regions corresponding to the number of widths of label stock, label stock guides might have an appropriate number of recessed guide regions, and the wall would be movable between an appropriate number of positions. Further, while the illustrated embodiment is described primarily with reference to label stock including a plurality of adhesive labels placed on a backing, it is recognized that backerless label stock, or other types of label stock, could be used by making appropriate modifications to handle the different type of label stock if needed. In addition, in place of label stock a printer including the above described guide features could utilize any other rolled print media. While the described print head is a thermal print head, other types of print heads could be used with appropriate, corresponding types of label stock. While a cassette free printer embodiment is primarily shown, it is recognized that various of the described features could be incorporated into the compartment of a print media cassette that holds the rolled label stock or other print media and is removable from the printer. In such an embodiment a media compartment of the printer cassette might include one or more of a label stock support arm with stepped regions, one or more label stock guides with recessed regions and an internal, movable wall. When such a cassette is installed within a printer the cassette is removably held in place and becomes part of the printer frame. Still further, while in the illustrated embodiment features are configured and positioned to maintain label stock or other print media in a centered position relative to a print line of a print head, various of the features could be used to maintain some other, non-centered reference position about a print line.

What is claimed is: